



## **MyPyramid.GOV: A HEALTHIER YOU . . . MADE EASIER!**

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“One size does not fit all.” That is exactly why the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) replaced the *Food Guide Pyramid*, adopted in 1992, with the new *MyPyramid* in 2005. The USDA developed the new pyramid to be a more individualized “food guidance system,” consisting of a new graphic and an exciting interactive website. *MyPyramid’s* messages mirror the recommendations in the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*; these include making half of your grains whole grains, varying the color of vegetables you eat in a day, and choosing the low-fat or fat-free varieties of milk, yogurt, and cheese. The new slogan accompanying the pyramid, “Steps to a Healthier You” conveys the message that individuals can benefit by taking small steps to improve their diet and lifestyle each day.

For months prior to the unveiling of the new pyramid, the public anxiously anticipated the changes the USDA was making. “Are the food groups changing?” and “Is the shape of the graphic still going to be a pyramid?” were just a few of the questions people asked. On April 19, 2005 speculation ended as the new pyramid was released along with its interactive website—receiving 60 million hits on the first day.

The new, simpler *MyPyramid* graphic was designed to encourage consumers to make healthier choices and to be active every day. To emphasize proportionality, variety, and moderation, the pyramid was “tipped on its side.” Instead of being stacked on top of each other, six color bands representing the five food groups along with oils now run

vertically. The narrowing of each color band from bottom to top represents moderation, with the wider base representing foods with little or no solid fats, added sugars, or caloric sweeteners. This reminds consumers to make smart choices within the food groups by choosing “nutrient dense” foods first, that is, foods that are low in fat and added sugar, but packed with other nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and fiber. The width of the different colored food groups represents the recommended proportion of foods to consume from each group daily—grains being the largest group while fats and oils make up the smallest group. Furthermore, the confusing references to “servings” of food on the old pyramid have been replaced by familiar household measures such as cups and ounces that are easier to understand and recognize.

For the first time, physical activity was incorporated into the graphic by adding a silhouette of a person climbing up the side. The USDA advises that it is important to be active most days of the week, aiming for a minimum goal of 30 minutes per day.

In addition to the new food and activity elements, the pyramid can be individualized. An active 22-year-old man and a sedentary 30-year-old woman have very different nutrition and calorie needs. But until the introduction of *MyPyramid*, the U.S. *Food Guide Pyramid* gave both—and all the varieties of ages and activity levels in the population—the same visual graphic for nutrition advice and information. The new pyramid, however, customizes recommendations based on age, gender, and activity level. For example, the generated *MyPyramid Plan* for an active 22-year-old man is 2,800 calories consisting of 10 ounces of grains, 3.5 cups of vegetables, 2.5 cups of fruits, 3 cups of milk, and 7 ounces of meat and/or beans every day. On the other hand, the *MyPyramid Plan* for a sedentary 30-year-old woman would be an 1,800 calorie per day

recommendation consisting of 6 ounces of grains, 2.5 cups of vegetables, 1.5 cups of fruits, 3 cups of milk, and 5 ounces of meat and/or beans every day. To obtain a personalized food and activity recommendation, get “inside the pyramid” by logging onto *mypyramid.gov*.

**USING MYPYRAMID.GOV:**

1. Log on to the Internet and go to *mypyramid.gov*.
2. Under “MyPyramid Plan” (on the right side of the home page) enter your age, weight, height, and activity level to find the pyramid that fits your calorie needs and recommended food group servings.
3. Under “View, Print, and Learn More,” print out a personalized miniposter of your results along with a “Meal Tracking Worksheet” to help you monitor your progress.
4. Fill out the worksheet and evaluate how you did today. Next, write down your goals for tomorrow.
5. Print out extras so you can be reminded at home and work.

For more in-depth information about each food group, “discretionary” calories, and physical activity click on the “Inside the Pyramid” link on the left-hand side of the home page. This area has tips and resources to help you implement your food plan including information on what counts as a serving, what foods are in each group, and even pictures to help identify portion sizes.

For a more detailed assessment of dietary intake and physical activity, visit “MyPyramid Tracker” by clicking on the link or going directly to *www.mypyramidtracker.gov*. At this point, click on “New User Registration” at the bottom of the screen to open an account or “Check It Out” to try out the website without registering. The database allows comparison of actual intake with the *2005 Dietary Guidelines* and *MyPyramid* recommendations. It is possible to look at your specific

nutrient intake as well as energy balance—a feature comparing the calories you consumed with the energy you burned.

**TIPS FOR ENTERING FOOD INTAKE INTO MyPYRAMID TRACKER:**

- If you cannot find a food you searched for, you can try a few different things. First, search for the food using its most basic name: “bread” instead of “7-grain whole wheat bread.” Second, make sure food is in the singular form i.e. “cracker” and not “crackers.” Finally, try searching for a comparable food.
- Select all the foods you ate for the day and then proceed to add the serving sizes all at once.
- After you have input serving sizes of the food you ate, click on “Save and Analyze” to view the results.

It may take a little while the first time you log on, but it gets easier every time. To cut down on time, build a list of foods frequently eaten and activities frequently performed.

*MyPyramid Tracker* is a great tool for monitoring and improving your health. Tracking food intake and physical activity has never been more easy or fun!

Additional information is available at the website, *mypyramid.gov*. *MyPyramid* materials designed specifically for children aged 6 to 11 can be found at *mypyramid.gov/kids/index.html*. And, the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and consumer brochure can be accessed at [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).

No Internet access? Visit a public library or a friend who has Internet. Printing a personalized diet plan and a tracking worksheet can be done in just five minutes. So, get online and start navigating the steps to a healthier you!